United Nations S/PV.8183

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8183rd meeting

Tuesday, 20 February 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tileuberdi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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18-04549 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Ambassador Necton Darlington Mhura, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Malawi to the United Nations

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset of this meeting, I should like, on behalf of the members of the Security Council, to express profound grief and sorrow at the passing of His Excellency Mr. Nector Darlington Mhura, Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations. The members of the Council convey their deepest sympathy to the family of Ambassador Mhura and to the Government and the people of Malawi.

Today also marks the one-year anniversary of the passing of Ambassador Vitaly Churkin of the Russian Federation.

I now invite the members of the Council to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of Ambassador Mhura and in memory of the late Ambassador Churkin.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the President of the Observer State of Palestine to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Observer State of Palestine, and I request the Protocol Officer to escort him to a seat at the Council table.

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Observer State of Palestine, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres, to whom I now give the floor.

The Secretary-General: I have just returned from a visit to Kuwait, which generously hosted a conference on the reconstruction of Iraq and helped mobilize critical resources. The international community showed its gratitude to the Iraqi people for their courageous victory over Da'esh. The support is a vote of confidence in the Government and the people of Iraq. Kuwait, Mr. President, played a very important leadership role in that very successful meeting.

Unfortunately, positive developments in Iraq are an exception in the region. That context underscores the need for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has lasted for far too long. I am here to reiterate my full personal commitment, and the commitment of the United Nations to supporting the parties in their efforts to achieve a two-State solution — a solution of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders; and a solution that addresses all final-status issues on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and mutual agreements. There is no plan B.

Yet we must face today's sad reality. After decades of support, the global consensus for a two-State solution could be eroding. Obstacles on the ground have the potential to create an irreversible one-State reality. It is simply impossible to square the circle of a one-State reality with the legitimate national, historic and democratic aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.

At the same time, conditions for Palestinians in Gaza, which has been under the control of Hamas for a decade, are dire. Shortfalls in the funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are a matter of international concern. The human security, rights and dignity of 5 million Palestine refugees are at stake. So, too, is the stability of the region. I appeal to the international community to step up its generous support.

This is a time for dialogue, for reconciliation, for reason. At this moment of grave consequence, I appeal for effective concerted action by all parties. It is more important than ever.

Allow me now, Mr. President, to ask you to give the floor to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, to deliver his monthly briefing to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: We meet this month as regional tensions are taking an increasingly perilous turn. Fighting in Syria is increasing, endangering de-escalation arrangements and regional stability, as well as undermining efforts for a political solution. Despite the positive news from Iraq and the defeat of Da'esh, much of the Middle East continues to be in the grips of an ongoing human tragedy of immense proportions.

Against that backdrop, and after over a century of hostilities, including 50 years of continued military occupation, Israelis and Palestinians are still no closer to peace. Many have lost hope that they will see it in their lifetimes. The enemies of peace are growing more confident by the day. They see every failure of the forces of moderation as a win for the forces of radicalization. They believe the political odds are turning in their favour. Day after day they are emboldened. Hindering peace are also those who push facts on the ground and who promote unilateral moves blocking the pathway back to the negotiating table.

None of that will bring us closer to resolving the conflict. None of it will respond to the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to statehood or the Israeli longing for security. It will only drive us farther down the road of confrontation, suffering and a one-State reality of perpetual occupation.

Last month the international community discussed key priorities to advance the goal of peace at the extraordinary ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians. At that meeting, I was encouraged by widespread, unequivocal messages reaffirming support for the two-State solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and the need to resume meaningful negotiations over all final-status issues, including the status of Jerusalem. Participants also made a critical commitment to undertaking efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, including support for projects focused on water, electricity and economic recovery.

My message to all was clear. First, we must clearly reaffirm that sustainable peace requires a two-State solution, which can be achieved only through a negotiated process. Israelis and Palestinians have defined the final-status issues and only they, together, can determine their resolution. Secondly, efforts must continue to seek implementation of concrete and transformative steps on the ground — including ending Israeli settlement expansion and advancing policy shifts, particularly in Area C — consistent with a transition to greater Palestinian civil authority, as called for in the 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet. Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority must continue to advance institution-building and service delivery to the Palestinian people and work towards bringing Gaza back under its control. Lastly, it is critical that any future peace proposal focus on the two-State solution and all final-status issues, as per prior agreements and relevant United Nations resolutions. Failure to do so could have dangerous repercussions.

Maintaining support for Palestine refugees is fundamental to the pursuit of peace and stability in the region. I reiterate my ongoing concern over the sizeable funding shortfall of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), despite the welcome flexibility of some Member States in accelerating the disbursement of their funding commitments. In addition, the emergency appeals launched on 30 January seek to raise $800 million for the West Bank and Gaza, as well as for the Syria regional crisis, to meet the essential needs of some 1.5 million highly vulnerable people. I encourage Member States to consider urgently providing new funding for UNRWA's critical requirements.

As the peace process falters and the gulf between the two sides widens, Palestinians and Israelis continue to suffer the violent consequences on the ground. Seven

Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in various incidents across the occupied Palestinian territory, and one Israeli civilian was stabbed and killed by a Palestinian in the West Bank. Three of the Palestinians killed died during violent clashes with Israeli security forces; one of them was a 16-year-old, shot near Ramallah. He was the fourth child killed in such circumstances since the beginning of the year.

I once again emphasize that the use of force must be calibrated and that lethal force should be used only as a last resort, with any resulting fatalities properly investigated by the authorities. I urge Israeli security forces to exercise maximum restraint in order to avoid casualties in such circumstances. I call upon all sides to reject violence, condemn terror, ensure accountability and work to reduce tensions.

In recent days we have also witnessed dangerous security incidents in and around Gaza. On 17 February, four Israeli soldiers were wounded by an improvised explosive device placed at the Gaza fence. This was followed by Israeli airstrikes on some 18 Hamas targets, while Palestinian militants fired two rockets into Israel — one causing damage to a house in the Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council. Two Palestinian teens were killed by Israeli security forces while reportedly attempting to approach the fence. Prior to this latest flare-up, during the course of the past month three more rockets were fired towards Israel, with two Israeli retaliatory airstrikes, all without injuries.

I encourage the international community to join the United Nations in calling on militants in Gaza to refrain from such provocations and end the building of tunnels and the firing of rockets towards Israel. Such actions and the response they elicit only risk the lives of Palestinians and Israelis, undermine peace efforts and increase the likelihood of another devastating conflict. I also take this opportunity to note the need to resolve the matter of the missing Israeli soldiers and civilians who are being held in Gaza.

Two additional incidents highlight the risk of escalation and the need for continued Israeli-Palestinian security coordination. These were the discovery of 12 roadside bombs in the West Bank on 26 January and the foiled attempt on 4 February to smuggle, within a shipment of medical equipment, a dual-use component used to make explosives into Gaza. I also note that the trial of 17-year-old Palestinian girl Ahed Tamimi started on 13 February behind closed doors. She has been detained on remand for two months to date. As stated in my last briefing (see S/PV.8167), the detention of a child must be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible time.

Throughout the reporting period, Israel's illegal settlement-related activities continued unabated. In response to last month's killing of a resident of the illegal Havat Gilad outpost, on 4 February, Israel approved the establishment of a new settlement to absorb its residents. I strongly denounce the expansion of the settlement enterprise as compensation for Israeli deaths. Settlement construction is not a morally appropriate way to respond to murder. On 12 February, Israel also advanced two settlement plans for some 85 housing units near Bethlehem. I reiterate the long-standing United Nations position that all settlement-related activities are illegal under international law and a substantial obstacle to peace, and I call on Israel to seize and reverse such policies.

The demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures also continued, with 31 structures affected, resulting in 33 Palestinians being displaced. Particularly concerning was the demolition of two donor-funded classrooms serving Palestinian children in the Bedouin community of Abu Nuwar. This is the sixth demolition or confiscation in the school since February 2016. Overall, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 44 schools in the occupied West Bank are currently at risk of demolition. I urge Israel to cease this practice.

I briefed the Council last week on the situation in Gaza. Month after month, we have raised the alarm about the humanitarian, economic and ecological calamity underway. It bears repeating that the situation is unsustainable. Continuing power cuts of up to 20 hours per day severely undermine the provision of basic services. Without additional immediate fuel deliveries, the situation could deteriorate, with dramatic consequences. I reiterate the Secretary-General's appreciation to the United Arab Emirates and the State of Qatar for their support in dealing with the emergency. Their immediate response to our appeal has helped stave off a further deterioration.

I am encouraged by the trilateral meeting I had last week with Palestinian Prime Minister Hamdallah and Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, Major General Mordechai, in which we focused on the humanitarian problems in Gaza. Both

sides reaffirmed their commitment to the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism and agreed that there is a need for a joint review to improve its functionality, transparency and predictability.

As the humanitarian crisis in Gaza escalates, the implementation of the Egyptian-brokered intra-Palestinian agreement has stalled. Absent immediate steps to address the humanitarian crisis and to revive the economy, we will face a total institutional and economic collapse in Gaza. This is not an alarmist prediction; it is a fact. I welcome the proposal of the Palestinian Government to incorporate into its 2018 budget some 20,000 civil service employees in Gaza. A positive outcome, however, is contingent, inter alia, upon the collection of taxes, the payment of salaries, the return of Government administration and, ultimately, security control of Gaza. I urge all sides to intensify their engagement and to move forward in this process.

For a decade, 2 million people have lived under the full control of Hamas, with crippling Israeli closures and movement and access restrictions. Throughout this period, the international community has provided aid and humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering and to rebuild what was destroyed in three devastating conflicts. It is time to break this cycle. It is time to return Gaza to the control of the legitimate Palestinian Authority, for there can be no Palestinian State without Palestinian unity. Those who stand in the way of reconciliation hurt the Palestinian national cause, and the price will be paid by generations of ordinary people.

The security situation in the Golan is also a growing concern. A worrying escalation occurred on 10 February, when the Israel Defense Forces destroyed what they identified as an Iranian unmanned aerial vehicle, which had reportedly entered its airspace from Syria. Shortly thereafter, Israeli aircraft targeted a Syrian airbase. During the attack, one Israeli jet was hit, injuring two pilots, which further prompted Israel to attack what it described as "12 military objectives" inside Syria. I urge all sides to work towards easing tensions in that highly volatile area.

I now turn briefly to Lebanon. Heightened rhetoric was exchanged between Israel and Lebanon over disputed maritime areas. The United Nations continues to call on the sides to act responsibly, avoid security risks and explore with the support of the United Nations ways to resolve the issue. Preparations continue for May parliamentary elections in Lebanon and for the upcoming second Rome conference and the Cedre conference to support the security sector and economy, respectively on 15 March and 5 April. While the situation was generally quiet in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, and despite heightened rhetoric concerning proposed construction by the Israeli Defense Forces in so-called reservation areas in Lebanon south of the Blue Line, construction began in non-reservation areas on 7 February with no incidents reported.

In conclusion, and to return to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I would like to reiterate that we in the international community must continue advocating for substantial changes to Israeli policy on the situation in the West Bank, including a halt to settlement construction, the demolition of structures and the prevention of Palestinian development in Area C. On Gaza, we must work collectively to alleviate the humanitarian disaster and provide full support to Egypt's reconciliation efforts. Our support to UNRWA also remains vital. I also hope that we will be able to look beyond the closed, dark negotiation rooms, currently empty of diplomats and politicians, to see that there are Israeli and Palestinian advocates for peace working tirelessly to promote change — civil-society organizations, youth and women's groups and religious and community leaders, which all have a critical role to play and must be supported and allowed to express their views freely. We rarely discuss their role and we do not speak often enough of the challenges they face, but their efforts must be recognized and supported.

In this Chamber we have often spoken of the need for leadership on both sides if we are to reach a deal — a compromise, through negotiations — that will enable the Israelis and Palestinians to separate and be masters of their own fates. But they would not be negotiations between equals, for one side is under military occupation. Its leadership has committed to working for a peaceful solution to the conflict through negotiations. I urge the international community not to give up on support for the moderate Palestinian leadership or for building up the institutions that will increase the chances of success. Our window of opportunity is closing, and if we do not seize it quickly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be engulfed in the whirlwind of religious radicalization that continues to roil the region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to President Abbas.

President Abbas (*spoke in Arabic*): Seventy years have passed since Palestine's Nakba took place and resulted in 6 million Palestinian refugees who continue to suffer from the cruelty of their exile and loss of human security and to wander the world after losing their peaceful, stable lives in their towns and villages. They are part of the 13 million Palestinians whose country has not yet been recognized as a full State Member of the United Nations, despite numerous international resolutions affirming their right to self-determination and to statehood in their national lands.

We are the heirs of the Canaanites who lived in Palestine more than 5,000 years ago and whose descendants have remained there to this day. Our great people remain rooted in their land. The Palestinian people have built their own cities and homeland and made contributions to humankind and civilization that the whole world has witnessed. They have established institutions, schools, hospitals, cultural institutions, theatres, libraries, publishing houses, newspapers, economic institutions, businesses and banks with wide regional and international influence. All of that existed before and after the Balfour Declaration, issued by the British Government in 1917, according to which people who had no ownership in Palestine gave it away to people who had no right to it. The British Government bears responsibility for the disastrous consequences inflicted on our Palestinian people as a result of the Declaration.

Since then, and despite the fact that our people have remained under occupation, they have continued their journey, building and developing their country after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. Their national institutions are recognized by international bodies for their merit and their work, which is founded on the principles of the rule of law, transparency and accountability, and the empowerment of women and young people in an environment of tolerance, cultural coexistence and non-discrimination. We have continued to strive to unite our people and our land, and to ensure that we are ruled by a single authority with a single body of law and united armed forces, and we are determined to ensure that we convene parliamentary and presidential elections.

Our belief is deeply rooted and our position on the use of arms of any kind is clear. Not only do we call for all nuclear weapons to be dismantled, we are also opposed to conventional weapons, which have caused such terrible destruction in many States in our region and all over the world. That is why we are committed to fostering a culture of peace, rejecting violence, pursuing sustainable development and building schools, hospitals, industrial zones, farms and technological production rather than establishing arms factories and buying tanks and fighter jets. We want our people to be able to live in freedom and dignity, far from wars and destruction. For the price of one tank we can build a school and provide protection for a generation. For the price of one fighter jet we can build a hospital and provide health protection for a generation much better than all weapons, conventional or otherwise.

What we really want for our people is a life of freedom and dignity, far from wars and destruction and from terrorism and extremism, which we are working relentlessly to combat all over the globe. Because of this, we signed 83 security agreements with 83 States around the world, including the United States, Russia and other countries of Europe and elsewhere. We have only one goal in signing these agreements, and that is fighting terrorism regardless of its grounds or origin.

Why are we here today? After a long journey and tremendous efforts to establish a political path based on negotiations that could lead to a comprehensive and just peace, we participated, as everyone knows, in the Madrid Conference in 1991 and signed the Oslo Accords in 1993. We were alone there with the Israelis and the Norwegians. The Oslo Accords affirmed the importance of arriving at a settlement of final-status issues before 1999. Unfortunately, that has not yet come to pass. We must therefore ask why it has still not been achieved although it is stipulated in the Accords.

Despite this, we have persisted in our efforts to achieve peace. We engaged in dialogue at Wye River and Camp David. We participated in the Annapolis Conference. We held talks with the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert for eight months. We met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in the presence of the former United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and George Mitchell. We also accepted President Putin's invitation to meet with Mr. Netanyahu in Moscow, but he has regrettably evaded participating in such a meeting. We further engaged in all earnest with former Secretary of State John Kerry, but the Israeli Government's intransigence resulted in the failure of all of those efforts. After that, how can it be said that it is we who reject negotiations? We have never refused any invitation to participate in negotiations. We believe

that negotiations are the only path towards peace. How then could we reject them? Believe me, that it is untrue.

Confronted with deadlock, we have neither given up nor lost hope. We have come to the United Nations believing in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which affirm, inter alia, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, as well as a people's right to self-determination. Article 40 and 41 reaffirm that. Nobody has held Israel accountable for occupying our territories in 1948. The Charter affirms the right of people to self-determination, which is among the issues the Council will address tomorrow. We continue to engage with all of its bodies in our quest to end the occupation of our land and people. Yet, in spite of all of that, the United Nations has failed to implement its relevant resolutions to date. Is that possible? Is it logical that despite the adoption of 705 General Assembly resolutions since 1948 and 86 Security Council resolutions in our favour, none of them have been implemented? Where are those resolutions that the Council has adopted? There are 86 Security Council resolutions, with no result whatsoever.

Is it logical for Israel to neglect its obligation to implement General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III)? As members of the Council may recall, those two resolutions were sine qua non for Israel to be accepted to the United Nations. Moshe Sharett wrote a letter indicating that he was ready to implement them. Owing to that commitment, Israel was accepted at the United Nations. However, up to this very day, those two resolutions have yet to be implemented.

Israel is acting as a State above the law. It has transformed the occupation from a temporary situation, as per international law, into a situation of a permanent colonization of territories that it has occupied since 1967. It was supposed to be temporary; however, it has become permanent. It colonized all the areas that it wanted, including Jerusalem, which the Council considers an occupied territory. How can that happen? Israel has shut all doors on the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. Here, we reaffirm, as we have done in the past, that our problem is not with the followers of Judaism. Judaism is a monotheistic religion, as are Christianity and Islam. Our problem is only with the occupiers of our land and those denying our independence and freedom, regardless of their religion.

We met with the President of the United States, Mr. Donald Trump, four times in 2017. We expressed our absolute readiness to reach a historic peace agreement. We repeatedly reaffirmed our position, in accordance with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. Yet that Administration has not clarified its position. Is it for the two-State solution or the one-State solution?

Subsequently, in a dangerous and unprecedented manner, the United States Administration made an unlawful decision, which was rejected by the international community, that resulted in taking the issue of Jerusalem off the table, without reason. It decided to recognize the city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and transfer its Embassy there. It did so ignoring that East Jerusalem is part of Palestinian territory. It has been occupied since 1967, and it is our capital, which we wish to be a city that is open to all the faithful of the monotheistic religions, especially Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

It is also strange that the United States still includes the Palestine Liberation Organization on its terrorist list and imposes restrictions on the work of our Mission in Washington, D.C., under the pretext of congressional decisions since 1987. Despite our bilateral relations with the United States, including assistance, visits and broad relations, we come to discover that the United States Congress believes we are terrorists. If the Congress believes we are terrorists, how is it that the Administration has relations with us? How is it visiting us? How is it providing assistance to us? How can it help terrorists?

Most recently, the United States has decided to punish Palestinian refugees by reducing its contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in spite of the facts that it supported the Agency's establishment and that it endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for a just and agreed solution for the plight of the refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The United States has contradicted itself. It has contradicted its own commitments and violated international law and relevant resolutions with its decision regarding Jerusalem. No country alone can resolve a regional or international conflict without the participation of other international partners. Therefore, it is our view and position that in order to

solve the Palestinian question it is essential to establish a multilateral international mechanism that emanates from an international conference and is in line with international law and relevant resolutions.

Faced with Israel's policies and practices in violation of international law and its non-compliance and non-implementation of agreements signed, the Palestinian Central Council — the highest Palestinian parliamentary body — decided several weeks ago to re-evaluate the relationship with Israel. Indeed, we will review the relationship, given that we have become an Authority without authority and the occupation has come at a great cost. We are even working for the occupation as its employees. We say that Israel must uphold its obligations as an occupying Power.

We do not oppose Israel shouldering its responsibility in the West Bank and Gaza because the situation is unbearable and unacceptable. In spite of that, before the Council I reaffirm our commitment to maintaining our institutions and achievements, which we have carried out on the ground in Palestine and in the international arena, thanks to the assistance of those present. We are determined to remain committed to the political, diplomatic and legal path, rejecting all violence and through political negotiations which we have never rejected. We will continue to extend our hands to make peace and work to end the Israeli occupation, based on the two-State solution along 1967 borders — two States recognized by the international community — pursuant to the relevant resolutions.

We want to realize our national aspirations, but at the same time we will continue to oppose any attempt from any side to impose solutions undermining that legitimacy. We will reject with all our capabilities any solution that violates that legitimacy. We have been granted the status of non-member observer State by the General Assembly, based upon which we have become State party to 105 international institutions, organizations and treaties. We have been recognized by 138 States. All of that has further strengthened the status of the State of Palestine, which continues to seek other recognition by the remaining States in the world, including States Members on the Council that have yet to recognize the State of Palestine despite the fact that the recognition of the State of Palestine does not negate negotiations. Recognition does not run contrary to negotiations, but rather promotes them. I therefore call on members that have yet to recognize the State of Palestine to do so. In the future, we will intensify our work to achieve admission as a full Member to the United Nations. We came to the Council once with that proposition and were rejected. We will come again and ensure international protection for our people. We will come to the Council and appeal for international protection for our people.

The situation is no longer tolerable. Members have listened to the Special Coordinator's briefing and we hope that they will support our efforts to secure the rights of 13 million Palestinians yearning for an independent homeland, just like every people in the world, and for their State to assume its rightful place within the international community. I say 13 million Palestinians, and others say that that is not true. But we are 13 million Palestinians whether we live within Palestine or in other countries.

I have come here before the Council in the middle of the deadlock in the peace process caused by the decision of the United States regarding Jerusalem, Israel's ongoing illegal settlement activities, its failure to respect signed agreements and its violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the latest of which is resolution 2334 (2016). We are here because of the Palestinians' desire to continue working constructively and courageously. We have the full courage to say yes and the full courage to say no, based on international law and our interests. We are here to build a culture of peace, reject violence, save the principle of two-States, obtain security and stability for all, restore hope to our people and the peoples of the region, and find a way out of the impasse which we face. We believe in comprehensive, lasting and just peace that is a strategic choice for the sake of future generations in our region, Palestinians and Israelis. I will therefore inform the Council about our plan.

First, we call for the convening of an international peace conference by mid-2018, predicated upon international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, with broad international participation, including the two parties concerned and regional and international stakeholders, foremost among them the permanent members of the Security Council and the Quartet in the same framework as the Paris conference for peace in the Middle East and the conference to be held in Moscow in line with resolution 1850 (2009). We have accordingly called for the convening of an international peace conference. The conference in Paris was attended by representatives of 74 States.

The outcome of the proposed conference should be as follows.

First, during its initial phase, it should result in the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member to the United Nations, and that is what we deserve. Does not everyone here believe that we deserve to become a full Member? Why not? We call on the Security Council to realize that goal. We will come to the Council in line with General Assembly resolution 67/19 of 29 November 2012, adopted by 138 votes in favour to 9 votes against, which supported our non-member observer status and guaranteed international protection for our people based on the 1967 borders and the exchange of recognition between the State of Palestine and the State of Israel along the 1967 borders.

During its second phase, it should result in the establishment of an international multilateral mechanism that will facilitate negotiations between the two parties to resolve all permanent status issues as defined by the Oslo Accords, including the issues of Jerusalem, borders, security, settlements, refugees, water and prisoners, which are to be resolved through an agreement by both parties. Negotiations leading up to that mechanism must be based on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, and their outcome must be implemented within a corresponding time frame with assurances for that implementation. Negotiations are to be defined by a timeline at the end of which the agreement must be implemented. That is the only way to resolve this long-standing conflict in the Middle East.

Secondly, during negotiations all parties must refrain from unilateral actions, in particular any that would prejudice the outcome of final-status negotiations, as set forth in the Oslo Accords of 1993. The Oslo Accords stipulate that all parties must refrain from unilateral actions, and, above all, any solution must be based on the cessation of settlement activities in territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the suspension of the decision concerning Jerusalem and the transfer of the United States embassy there, as that hinders negotiations. The relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), must be respected. At the same time, the State of Palestine would refrain from joining other organizations, as we have already committed ourselves to 22 international organizations out of 500 organizations and treaties. We have committed and we continue to be committed, although unfortunately the United States Administration did not fulfil its commitment.

Thirdly, the Arab Peace Initiative must be implemented, as adopted from A to Z, and not from Z to A. According to the Initiative, the Palestinian question must be resolved first, before regional issues. That was affirmed by the Initiative and all Arabs and Muslims who have adopted it. When the Initiative is implemented and the State of Palestine is recognized within the 1967 borders and the problem is resolved, all Arabs and Muslims will be ready to recognize the State of Israel — all Arabs and Muslims. All 57 Arab and Muslim countries will recognize the State of Israel and normalize relations with it, as stipulated in several Arab summit agreements. In that regard, we reiterate the terms of reference for any upcoming negotiations, including, first, respect for international law.

We are a State, but that has not yet been recognized. Nevertheless, we affirm respect for international law and relevant resolutions. First, all resolutions must be respected, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), through to resolution 2334 (2016), and the Arab Peace Initiative, along with signed agreements. Secondly, we affirm the preservation of the principle of the two-State solution, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security on the basis of 4 June 1967 borders. We reject partial solutions and a State that has provisional borders. Thirdly, we call for the acceptance of minimal land swaps that are equal in value and size in accordance with an agreement between the two parties. Fourthly, East Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Palestine, open to the members of the three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Fifthly, we must ensure the security of the two States, without undermining their independence and sovereignty, by the presence on the borders of a third party to protect Israel and Palestine. Sovereignty is key and cannot be preserved by hegemony and control. Sixthly, there must be a just and agreed upon solution for Palestine refugees on the basis of resolution 194 (III) and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative. Pending a just solution for the refugees' issue, there must be ongoing international commitment and support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Who will take care of the 6 million educated refugees if assistance for them is halted? If assistance is stopped, they will become terrorists or refugees in Europe. That is the

alternative unless the Council continues to support UNWRA until the crisis ends.

We stand ready to embark on the longest journey to the farthest places in the world in order to enjoy our rights but we will not move one inch if we are asked to forsake those rights. We will present any agreement reached with Israel to a general referendum among our people so as to respect democracy and strengthen legitimacy. We believe we are a democratic and civilized people. Therefore we will call a general referendum.

We knocked on your door today, Mr. President, as you preside over the highest international body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. We have presented our vision for peace. It is hoped that it will be received with wisdom and justice. We are ready to begin negotiations immediately in order to achieve the freedom and independence of our people — just like all other nations — as well as peace and security for everyone in our region and the world, so that future generations can enjoy the benefits of that peace, following the enormous sacrifices made by our people. We recognize our martyrs, the wounded and the prisoners.

The Security Council is the highest world body. After the Council, we leave our issue in the hands of the Almighty, until Judgment Day. If justice for all people cannot be attained here, where should we go? Please help us. We call upon the Council to help us so that we do not commit acts that are at variance with our beliefs, those of the Council and the world.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank President Abbas for his statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I expected Mr. Abbas to stay with us and have a dialogue. Regrettably, once again he has run away. Look what just happened in this room. Mr. Abbas entered, put his demands on the table and left. He expects the Security Council to deliver the result. It will not work that way. The only way to move forward is through direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

It is unfortunate that we are meeting here today. For the past seven and a half years, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, has refused to meet even once with Prime Minister Netanyahu. He has refused to negotiate peace. Yet, during that same time, Mr. Abbas has made seven trips here to the United Nations. Today, once again, rather than driving just 12 minutes between Ramallah and Jerusalem, he has chosen to fly 12 hours to New York to avoid the possibility of peace. Mr. Abbas has made it clear with his words and actions that he is no longer part of the solution; he is the problem.

What has he done to improve the life of a single person in Ramallah or Gaza? The Palestinians need leadership that will invest in education, not glorify violence. They need leadership that will build hospitals, not pay terrorists. They need leadership that will negotiate with Israel, speak to us and not run away from dialogue.

Mr. Abbas just addressed the members of the Security Council and spoke about his commitment to peace. That is what he often does when speaking in international forums. But when he addresses his people in Arabic, he conveys a very different message. A few weeks ago when Mr. Abbas spoke to the Palestine Liberation Organization Central Council, he called the national movement of the Jewish people "a colonialist project that has no connection to Judaism". In that same shameful speech, he had the audacity to accuse Jews of supporting anti-Semitism in order to promote Zionism. It was not the first time he used such hateful language. In September 2015, as part of his attempts to delegitimize the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel, he stated that "the Jews have no right to the Temple Mount and other holy sites. The Jews desecrate them with their filthy feet". He then went on to incite his people to violence, saying, "we welcome every drop of blood spilled in Jerusalem".

Mr. Abbas inspires a culture of hate within Palestinian society. He names schools and public squares in honour of terrorists. He encourages Palestinian children to hate by teaching them in school that Jews are descendants of apes. Just this month, his Fatah faction praised the terrorists who killed Rabbi Raziel Shevach, and he remained silent and refused to condemn the terrorists who killed a father of six as he was driving home to see his children.

Mr. Abbas's incitement does not end with rhetoric. He has made it official Palestinian policy to sponsor terrorism. In 2017, he spent $345 million to pay terrorists for killing innocent Israelis. That is 50 per cent of the total foreign aid donated to the Palestinian Authority — 50 per cent of its money — which is money

he could have spent building 40 hospitals. That is money he could have used to build 172 schools — every year.

His travels around the world to seek international intervention are an attempt to avoid the hard choices necessary for peace. He looks to every possible forum because he does not want to actually negotiate with Israel.

It is unfortunate, but this reckless behaviour by Chairman Abbas is nothing new. It is a pattern set throughout over 70 years of missed opportunities by Palestinian leadership whose spirit he continues to embody. We recently celebrated 70 years since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II). For the Jewish people, it represented international recognition of our historic rights to our homeland. We accepted the resolution immediately. It was not perfect. It did not provide us with all that we deserved. But it gave us hope for a better future. Yet, this past November, as Israel celebrated this milestone, the Palestinians marked the anniversary with grief and mourning, just as they did 70 years ago when they chose to reject it. Since that moment in 1947, Israelis valiantly fought in too many wars against enemies intent on destroying our country.

Over time, brave leaders emerged in Egypt and Jordan — leaders who were willing to negotiate, compromise and ultimately sign peace agreements with Israel. But the Palestinian leadership continued to choose conflict over coexistence. At the Camp David summit, in 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak presented the Palestinians with an unprecedented offer. What was Mahmoud Abbas's reaction? He chose to side with Yasser Arafat, claim it was a trap and reject the proposal. That was back in 2000.

In 2005, Mahmoud Abbas was elected to chair the Palestinian Authority. The world hoped he would follow in the courageous footsteps of President Sadat and King Hussein, seek peace with Israel and forge a better future for Palestinians. But he let his people down. Since the day he took office, peace plan after peace plan has been accepted by Israel and rejected by Mr. Abbas. Time and again, Israeli leaders have sat with Mr. Abbas — three different Israeli Prime Ministers, three different American Presidents — but every time an inch towards progress is made, Mr. Abbas runs away.

In 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered the most generous deal since resolution 181 (II): an almost complete withdrawal from Judea and Samaria and a direct link to the Gaza Strip. The offer even included a plan to place the Old City of Jerusalem, the gateway to our holiest sites, under international control. Mr. Abbas's response was simple: an unequivocal no.

Two years later, Prime Minister Netanyahu did something unprecedented. In an attempt to restart negotiations, he initiated a 10-month freeze on Jewish construction in Judea and Samaria. That was a precondition to which no Israeli Prime Minister, not even Yitzhak Rabin or Shimon Peres, had ever agreed. But soon enough, the 10 months passed, and Mahmoud Abbas was nowhere to be found. He never came to the table.

In 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry opened another attempt at negotiations. Once again, Prime Minister Netanyahu was ready to talk and negotiate. Once again, Chairman Abbas responded by breaking his commitment to Secretary Kerry. He chose the unilateral action of joining international conventions. Then he sought peace with Hamas, the internationally recognized terrorist organization, without even demanding that it renounce violence.

Today, as we speak, the current United States Administration is once again working very hard to make progress towards peace. Mr. Abbas, however, is once again looking hard for an excuse. This time he claims it was the American announcement about Jerusalem that drove him to reject negotiations. By recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, President Trump simply stated what should be clear to everyone.

Let me be clear. For thousands of years Jerusalem has been the heart and soul of our people. Jerusalem has been our capital since the days of King David. And Jerusalem will remain the undivided capital of the State of Israel forever. We will always insist on Israeli sovereignty over a united Jerusalem. But even fair-minded observers would agree that, under any possible agreement, Jerusalem will be recognized internationally as our capital.

After all these years of Abbas's rejectionism, one thing is very clear: when we extend a hand, Abbas extends a fist. Only when the terrorists of Hamas extend a hand does Abbas embrace them with open arms and without preconditions. Mr. Abbas has not even insisted on the basic human gesture of demanding the return of the Israeli civilians and the remains of Israel Defense Forces soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, savagely being held by Hamas.

Israelis are an optimistic people. We weathered four bloody wars with Egypt while waiting for a leader like Anwar Sadat to courageously visit Jerusalem. It took decades of talks with Jordan until the time was right for King Hussein to enter into what he rightly called a peace of the brave.

Three times a day Jews in Israel and all over the world turn to Jerusalem and pray for peace. We ask the following from God:

> "Grant peace, goodness and blessing, grace, loving-kindness and mercy to us and unto all Israel and all of the world."

We have no doubt that the day will come when the Palestinian people will also be blessed with leadership that shares these noble aspirations. This will be a leadership that condemns violence and ends the shameful practice of paying salaries to terrorists. It will be a leadership that educates its people on tolerance instead of peddling anti-Semitism. It will be a leadership that recognizes that Israel is and always will be the national homeland of the Jewish people.

Israel eagerly awaits the day when such a Palestinian leadership will emerge and bring hope for a better future for its people and our region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I wish to thank the Secretary-General for being with us today as well as Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

We are meeting today in a forum that is very familiar to all of us. This meeting on the Middle East has been taking place each month for many, many years; its focus has been almost entirely on issues facing Israelis and Palestinians, and we have heard many of the same arguments and ideas over and over again. We have already heard them again this morning.

It is as if saying the same things repeatedly without actually doing the hard work and making the necessary compromises will achieve anything. Beginning last year we have tried to broaden the discussion, and we have had some success in doing so. I thank my colleagues who have participated in those broader discussions. One reason we did that is our well-founded belief that the United Nations spends an altogether disproportionate amount of time on Israeli-Palestinian issues.

It is not that those issues are unimportant. They are certainly very important. The problem is that the United Nations has proved itself time and again to be a grossly biased Organization when it comes to Israel. As such, the disproportionate focus of the United Nations has actually made the problem more difficult to solve by elevating the tensions and the grievances between the two parties.

Another reason we have attempted to shift the discussion is that the vast scope of the challenges facing the region dwarf the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As we meet here today, the Middle East is plagued by many truly horrendous problems. In Yemen, there is one of the worst humanitarian disasters on Earth, with millions of people facing starvation. Meanwhile militia groups fire Iranian rockets from Yemen into neighbouring countries.

In Syria, the Al-Assad regime is using chemical weapons to gas its own people. This war has taken the lives of more than half a million Syrians. Millions more have been pushed into neighbouring Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon as refugees, causing major hardships in those countries. In Lebanon, Hizbullah's terrorists exert ever more control, illegally building up a stockpile of offensive weapons, inviting a dangerous escalation that could devastate regional security.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham is engaged in an inhumane level of cruelty in much of the region. It has been dealt severe setbacks in Iraq and Syria, but it is not yet completely destroyed and still poses serious threats.

Egypt faces repeated terrorist attacks, and of course there is the terrorist-sponsoring regime in Tehran that initiates and encourages most of the troubles I have just outlined.

These immense security and humanitarian challenges throughout the region should occupy more of our attention rather than having us sit here month after month and use the most democratic country in the Middle East as a scapegoat for the region's problems. But here we go again.

I do not mean to suggest that there is no suffering in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both sides have suffered greatly. So many innocent Israelis have been killed or injured by suicide bombings, stabbings and other sickening terrorist attacks. Israel has been forced to live under constant security threats like virtually no

other country in the world. It should not have to live that way. And yet Israel has overcome those burdens; it is a thriving country with a vibrant economy that contributes much to the world in the name of technology, science and the arts.

It is the Palestinian people who are suffering more. The Palestinians in Gaza live under Hamas terrorist oppression. I cannot even call it a governing authority, as Hamas provides so little in the way of what one would normally think as Government services. The people of Gaza live in truly awful conditions, while their Hamas rulers put their resources into building terror tunnels and rockets. The Palestinians in the West Bank also suffer greatly. Too many have died, and too much potential has been lost in this conflict. We are joined here today by Palestinian Authority President Abbas. I am sorry he declined to stay in the Chamber to hear the remarks of others. Even though he has left the room, I will address the balance of my remarks to him.

When the new American Administration came into office last January, we did so against the fresh backdrop of the passage of resolution 2334 (2016). In the waning days of the previous American Administration, the United States made a serious error in allowing that resolution to be adopted. Resolution 2334 (2016) was wrong on many levels. I am not going to get into the substance now. But beyond the substance, perhaps its biggest flaw was that it encouraged the false notion that Israel can be pushed into a deal that undermines its vital interests, damaging the prospects for peace by increasing mistrust between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

In the past year, the United States has worked to repair that damage. At the United Nations I have opposed the bias against Israel, as any ally should do. But that does not mean that I or our Administration is against the Palestinian people. Just the opposite is true; we recognize the suffering of the Palestinian people, as I have recognized it here today.

I sit here today offering the outstretched hand of the United States to the Palestinian people in the cause of peace. We are fully prepared to look to a future of prosperity and coexistence. We welcome President Abbas as the leader of the Palestinian people here today. But I will decline the advice I was recently given by his top negotiator, Saeb Erekat. I will not shut up; rather, I will respectfully speak some hard truths.

The Palestinian leadership has a choice to make between two different paths. There is the path of absolutist demands, hateful rhetoric and incitement to violence. That path has led and will continue to lead to nothing but hardship for the Palestinian people. Or there is the path of negotiation and compromise. History has shown that path to be successful for Egypt and Jordan, including the transfer of territory. That path remains open to the Palestinian leadership if only it is courageous enough to take it.

The United States knows the Palestinian leadership was very unhappy with the decision to move our embassy to Jerusalem. It does not have to like that decision. It does not have to praise it. It does not even have to accept it. But know this: that decision will not change.

So once again you must choose between two paths. You can choose to denounce the United States, reject the United States' role in peace talks and pursue punitive measures against Israel in international forums such as the United Nations. I assure you that path will get the Palestinian people exactly nowhere towards the achievement of their aspirations. Or you can choose to put aside your anger about the location of our embassy and move forward with us towards a negotiated compromise that holds great potential for improving the lives of the Palestinian people.

Putting forward old talking points and entrenched and undeveloped concepts achieves nothing. That approach has been tried many times and has always failed. After so many decades, we welcome new thinking. As I mentioned in the meeting held last month on this issue (see S/PV.8167), the United States stands ready to work with the Palestinian leadership. Our negotiators are sitting right behind me, ready to talk. But we will not chase after you. The choice is yours.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to express our appreciation to you, Sir, as President of the Security Council, to my colleagues on the Council and to everyone in this Chamber today for the tribute to the memory of Vitaly Ivanovich Churkin, the late Permanent Representative of Russia, exactly a year since he was unexpectedly and untimely taken from us. I thank you.

I would also like to express our sorrow and sympathy at the passing yesterday of our dear friend and colleague Mr. Necton Mhura, Permanent Representative of Malawi.

We are pleased to welcome Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, to the Council Chamber. We believe that the participation of the leader of Palestine in today's meeting is important to an understanding of the current situation in the Middle East. We thank Mr. Mladenov for his informative report on the situation regarding the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli situation.

The long-suffering region of the Middle East is being ripped apart by violent conflicts, in Syria, Yemen and Libya, all of them in themselves deeply critical. But it would be deluded to think that the Palestinian problem has now taken a back seat and an even greater mistake to put it there on purpose. Even today it is still the epicentre of the chronic instability in the Middle East. The situation in the area has recently deteriorated. In the absence of full-fledged political negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis, the notorious recent decisions regarding Jerusalem have not only inflamed emotions and pushed the situation into another destabilizing cycle, they have intensified people's desperation. There have been demonstrations in the West Bank and Gaza and angry statements from the Palestinian leadership and the capitals of the Arab-Muslim world, all of which only confirm the sensitive significance of the problem of Jerusalem, the cradle of three monotheistic religions.

We believe that increasing the pace of Israeli settlement activity will undermine the prospects for achieving a two-State solution and that the policy should be ended. Ensuring the ability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to do its work effectively is absolutely critical. We must never let the Palestinians find themselves in circumstances where they have nothing to lose, practically speaking, a situation that would fuel radicalism and has the potential to blow up the situation in the Palestinian territories and the entire region. Russia contributes regularly to the Agency's budget as well as giving the Palestinians bilateral assistance.

It bears repeating that the current status quo in this protracted conflict is incapable of producing a reliable, lasting and viable outcome. Only a settlement based on a two-State formula, presupposing the peaceful and secure coexistence of two States, Palestine and Israel, will enable the crisis to be overcome and create the conditions for sustainable development and a road to peace. As the situation evolves, Russia will continue its efforts to maintain the architecture of the Middle East settlement and to lead the political process out of its current depressed state. The priority task right now is achieving an immediate resumption of direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on a generally recognized international legal basis, including the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We firmly believe that the Middle East Quartet still has the full potential to be a unique mediation format, approved by the Council's resolutions. There should be no question that the group of four mediators, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, is capable of playing a role in unfreezing the political dialogue. The work of the Quartet, particularly its report of June 2016, has not lost its relevance. Implementing the report's recommendations will help to strengthen confidence-building measures between the parties. It discusses what to do about the settlement activity, the persistent provocative rhetoric and violence from both sides and other factors, as well as the imperative of ensuring that the Palestinians achieve genuine national unity based on the political platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization. We support activating this mechanism and its regular and thorough collaboration with the League of Arab States and all the regional and global stakeholders that are capable of helping to overcome the dangerous impasse in the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. We particularly welcome Egypt and Jordan's efforts in that regard. Our Egyptian partners' mission to unite the Palestinians' ranks continues to be vital.

Getting new developments with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict requires considering how the international community will support the process so as to create the conditions for direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel. A direct dialogue on settling all final-status issues is a given in the Middle East peace process equation. We must focus on developing a formula acceptable to both sides. We are ready to discuss its parameters with all global and regional stakeholders. As we all know, the last two weeks in Russia have seen numerous contacts conducted at the highest level, including visits by King Abdullah II of Jordan, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Abbas. We reaffirm our willingness to provide a platform in Russia for a meeting of Palestinian and Israeli leaders, without preconditions. We expect the proposal will receive a positive response from both sides.

We would like to emphasize that achieving a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, as with the resolution of other regional problems, will require joint efforts and collective and mutually respectful cooperation. All efforts to lay blame, groundless accusations and insulting rhetoric must be left behind, forever part of the past. We must rather activate channels for dialogue where we can discuss ways for resolving these difficult problems. The measures for confidence-building and security for the entire Middle East that we have long proposed still remain on the agenda.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for their important and informative briefings, and to welcome the presence here of President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine and the courageous and constant commitment to peace and negotiations that he has reaffirmed before the Council today.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not just one more crisis among all the crises rocking the Middle East. It is the oldest conflict in the region and one whose symbolic dimension, historical depth and regional reverberations transcend the borders of Israel and the Palestinian territories. And lastly, it is a conflict whose centrality and dynamics have always given terrorist groups active in the region and beyond grounds for recruitment. Now, almost a quarter of a century after the Oslo Accords, the prospects for peace continue to diminish both on the ground and in discussions and minds. During that time, the new generation of Palestinians and Israelis that has grown up has seen the hopes for a settlement of the conflict recede. In that regard, there are some who may be tempted to turn everything upside down, particularly by transforming a political disagreement that seeks compromise into a religious conflict where no concessions are possible. We should be very conscious of the risk of that happening.

We cannot ignore the fact that in reality the so-called status quo on the ground is deteriorating every day, thanks in part to colonization and more generally to Israel's occupation. It is also marked by violence, which continues to be used and encouraged by several movements, including Hamas, in a situation that may degenerate and lead to uncontrollable regional consequences at any time. The risk of escalation is particularly evident in Gaza, which is my first point and which the news of the past few days compels me to make. Recent incidents, against a background of humanitarian and economic crises in the Gaza Strip, increase the risk of a new conflict like the three Gaza experienced over the past decade. In order to avoid new violence, whose primary victims would be the people of Gaza, we call on everyone to exercise restraint. I want to reiterate that we will never compromise on Israel's security and reiterate our strong condemnation of the attacks perpetrated on Israel's territory — be they the use of explosives, the indiscriminate rocket fire that has recently resumed, or the digging of offensive tunnels such as that which has just been destroyed by Israeli forces.

Beyond the urgently required de-escalation, there can be no lasting solution for Gaza without the return of the Palestinian Authority under the authority of Mahmoud Abbas and within the framework of the principles endorsed by the Palestine Liberation Organization. In that regard, we reiterate our commitment to the implementation of the agreement signed in Cairo on 12 October 2017 by Fatah and Hamas, which should enable the Palestinian Authority to fully exercise its prerogatives in the Gaza Strip, including in the area of security. That process must result in a rapid improvement of the living conditions of the people in Gaza and must also be accompanied by a lifting of the blockade, as well as credible security guarantees for Israel. France stands ready to support those efforts.

Finally, we must not separate the situation in Gaza from the Palestinian question as a whole. Gaza is an integral part of the Palestinian territories, and there can be no Palestinian State or viable peace agreement with Israel without Gaza. Palestinian unity is therefore essential to peace in the Middle East.

My second point concerns the conflict as a whole. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the oldest of the conflicts that are tearing apart the Middle East and the only one whose solution is also widely known and shared. This solution is based on the principle of two States living in peace and security within secure and recognized borders; borders drawn on the basis of the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed exchanges of territories; Jerusalem as the future capital of those two States; and a concerted, realistic and fair solution for Palestinian refugees. Any negotiations must be based on internationally agreed parameters, which themselves are based on international law and the resolutions of the Council. These parameters are not optional, but rather the very framework for negotiations. We know very well that the fate of the Israelis and the Palestinians are

connected. Neither of the two peoples will sustainably achieve their national aspirations at the expense of the other. Today we are at a crossroads, at a critical moment when each of the parameters I have just listed has been weakened.

With regard to the 1967 lines, the settlement of Palestinian territories and all the accompanying legislative and administrative measures are trying to impose another reality on the ground and to implement a project that is incompatible with the two-State solution. If we are not careful, that solution will disappear like a mirage in the desert. After a record year for settlement in 2017, there have already been announcements of some 1,800 housing units this year. The position of France is clear. We condemn settlement activity in all its forms. It is illegal under international law, as recalled in resolution 2334 (2016). It is also dangerous, since it destroys on the ground the possibility of two States and undermines trust between the parties.

With regard to the issue of Jerusalem, the status of the city can be determined only by the parties themselves within the framework of a peace agreement. Under such a future agreement, the city is destined to become the capital of two States, Israel and Palestine. In the absence of agreement, we do not recognize any sovereignty over Jerusalem. We therefore do not agree with any announcement that deviates from the international consensus and relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 478 (1980). Similarly, we regret the adoption early this year of an Israeli law on Jerusalem that will make it much more difficult to share Jerusalem as part of a future peace agreement.

Finally, the situation of the Palestinian refugee camps is a time bomb in Gaza — I will not dwell on this — and throughout the region. As long as a realistic and fair solution for refugees remains out of reach, the provision of basic services by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees will be essential. This is a humanitarian imperative, in particular in areas such as medical assistance and food supplies. It is also a question of human development, in particular when it comes to UNRWA's network of schools, and an imperative for the security and stability of the region. The situation in Lebanon is particularly worrying in this respect.

Let us be clear. The weaker UNRWA becomes, the more terrorist groups can use Palestinian refugee camps as breeding grounds for recruitment. In the name of humanitarian requirements, but also realism and our security interests, we call on the United States not to give up the historic and vital role it plays with regard to UNRWA. At the same time, all current and potential donors should renew their efforts to promote UNRWA as a unique tool for regional stabilization.

I have recalled the main parameters for a solution to the conflict, which are based on the Council's resolutions. My third and last point is: How can we contribute on this basis to a resumption of negotiations? We acknowledge the commitment of the United States, whose role is essential, to fostering a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on a final-status agreement. We hope the American proposals will be within the framework agreed by the international community, as recalled by President Emmanuel Macron when he met with Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu and President Mahmoud Abbas in December 2017. Our authorities intend to remain in close contact with the parties in order to contribute to the preservation of the possibility of two States on the ground and the resumption of negotiations.

With regard to methodology, we welcome the proposals made today by President Abbas and are open to exploring the development of the ways in which the international community can support the peace process. France has been reflecting on that for a long time. That is what motivated our initiative leading to the Paris conference on 15 January 2017, at which more than 70 countries renewed their agreement on the parameters for peace and the idea that Israelis and Palestinians should themselves create a lasting solution through negotiations. Such a development is intended not to undermine the role of the United States, whose commitment to supporting the peace process is indispensable, but to make it possible for the actors who can play a constructive role with the parties to more easily join together, on the basis of the international parameters I have described, in order to help the parties to resume and successfully carry out the peace negotiations. In that regard, regional actors would play a crucial role by offering, on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, the prospect of full regional normalization for Israel in the wake of a peace agreement. Similarly, Council members should provide their support.

In the difficult context I have just described, I want to solemnly reiterate that there is no viable alternative to the two-State solution. A single State would lead to two parallel citizenship regimes in the same territory, thereby creating an unequal situation that would be unacceptable in principle and catastrophic in its consequences. Such a situation would represent a double impasse. For the Palestinians, it would mean the abandonment of their aspirations for statehood; for the Israelis, it would mean the demise of their national democratic project.

If there is one urgent need today, it is to offer Israelis and Palestinians a political future by actively working to restore hope for two States and the possibility of negotiations between the parties. France, because it is a friend of both Israelis and Palestinians, intends to play its full role nationally and with its international partners.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for their, as always, detailed but sobering briefings to the Security Council. I want to say too that we fully support the work on the ground of Mr. Mladenov and his team and the work that they do every day to search for peace in the Middle East.

We were also pleased to see President Abbas in the Chamber today and to hear his message.

For many years, we have spoken about the Middle East peace process as being at a crossroads. This statement has never been more accurate than it is today. And at every crossroads there is a choice to be made. At this moment in time, there are a number of worrying developments in terms of the choices we see being made. Accelerated illegal settlement expansion, harmful Israeli legislative measures, resurgent violence including rocket attacks, the grave and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza — which we dealt with in detail last week — and a threat to the specific status of Jerusalem, as it is embodied in, inter alia, resolution 478 (1980), are among the many examples. At the same time, our commonly agreed destination is as clear as ever. It is two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

In order to contribute to the two-State solution, we must acknowledge the fundamental root cause of the conflict, which the occupation. If we are to be able to reach a sustainable peace, humanitarian, economic and political actions are all needed, but their full engagement will not suffice if the illegal occupation of Palestine does not end. As we work on the steps ahead, this perspective must be kept in mind. Sweden remains fully committed to the two-State solution, based on international law, known parametres and relevant resolutions of the Council, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Respect for international law and United Nations resolutions remains at the core of the peace process. It is therefore more important than ever to be principled and to base our decisions and actions on international law. The Council is central to upholding the rules-based system, and the debate tomorrow will also focus on the significance of this system and respect for the Charter of the United Nations. The aim remains two States living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both. That is also the policy of the European Union. There is no alternative, and that is why no action should be taken that prejudges the final-status issues. Such issues can be taken off the table only as part of negotiations between the parties. That includes Jerusalem and refugees. In this regard, the Council has a duty to uphold its resolutions on the special status of Jerusalem.

We were pleased to see President Abbas in the Security Council today, as I said earlier. Sweden recognized Palestine in 2014 and fully supports Palestinian state-building. For sustainable progress, efforts towards the re-establishment of Palestinian Authority control in Gaza and intra-Palestinian reconciliation are crucial, as are continued efforts to strengthen inclusive and democratic institutions and processes in Palestine.

As Special Coordinator Mladenov said, the peace process needs to be inclusive in order to advance and achieve sustainable results. Women's fair representation and full and meaningful participation in the peace process is a prerequisite for progress. The younger generations must also be included and given hope of a better future and an alternative to the current situation. The private sector also has a role to play. In both Palestine and Israel, civil society plays a crucial role in advancing peace. That is why Sweden engages closely and widely with civil society, in particular women's groups and youth, in both countries.

As previously stated, including in the Council last week, a significant reduction of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is deeply worrisome and

must be urgently and sustainably resolved. Failure to resolve the funding situation will have serious humanitarian and security consequences in the region. For that reason, Sweden has already made our payment of $59 million for 2018 to UNRWA, and we urge others to step up their funding, including by making their payments as early as possible. Furthermore, Sweden, Jordan and Egypt, together with UNRWA and the Secretary-General, have decided to co-host a ministerial conference in the spring on the Agency's pressing financial situation.

We are indeed at a crossroads. Our final destination — the two-State solution — is getting further away by the day. The political and even physical space for a two-State solution is drastically shrinking. The choices that we all make — Israelis, Palestinians and as members of the Council — will determine where we end up. The Council also has a responsibility to act, including by supporting the parties in moving from words to action. Difficult choices need to be made. What is needed now is political leadership and courage to make the bold choices and pick the right path to break the long-term deadlock and restart a genuine peace process. Only that way can we reach our commonly agreed final destination.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation offers its gratitude for and welcome to the presence of His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, to whom I offer our deepest respect and admiration.

I also welcome the presence of the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We further commend the initiative of the presidency of Kuwait for organizing this important meeting.

Bolivia comes to this important meeting, the second of 2018 on this issue, with great concern, as every day we continue to see the suffocation of the people of Palestine by Israel through expansionist and colonialist policies that violate international law and the resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Security Council. It is necessary and critical to recall that, while there are two parties to this conflict, they are not of equality status. One of those parties, Israel, is the occupying Power; the other, Palestine, is an occupied people. This is a historical and glaring inequality. One of the parties has used and uses force to occupy the territory of another. One of the parties has built a wall that, according to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, constitutes a violation of international law. One of the parties builds illegal settlements in the territory of the other. One of the parties displaces civilians by force, confiscates land, demolishes housing and transfers settlers to illegally built settlements. One of the parties has imposed a blockade on Gaza, with terrible humanitarian consequences, including limited access to basic services. One of the parties is responsible for the existence of 5 million Palestinian refugees. One of the parties appropriates the water and agricultural land resources of the other. One of the parties has unleashed a brutal military campaign against the Palestinian people. One of the parties commits serious violations of human rights and may have committed crimes of war. One of the parties forcibly displaces Palestinian civilians. One of the parties shirks its international obligations and systematically violates the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

For example, Gaza is currently suffering electricity blackouts of up to 16 hours a day, and there is a severe shortage of drinking water, medicines and basic supplies. Fuel reserves are running dry. These facts have dreadful repercussions, such as the closure of hospitals and the possible collapse of basic services, in addition to the likelihood of a cholera outbreak. The situation is alarming, and even more so now that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA), which provides humanitarian assistance to more than 1 million people in Gaza, is facing a financial crisis that is undermining its response capacity. In that regard, we express our concern about the announced cuts in UNRWA funding, a measure that is no more than a manifest way to politicize the dignity and human security of nearly 5 million Palestinian refugees. We welcome the initiative of Sweden, among other States, to convene a ministerial conference to address that important and urgent matter.

For 50 years, Israeli policies of dispossession, occupation and discrimination have heightened the suffering of the Palestinian people. In January alone, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 32 Palestinian structures in the West Bank — approximately the same number of structures as the monthly average of 2017. Thirty-seven persons were displaced and another 82 were affected as a result. In other words, we must speak not of a status quo in the situation of

the occupied Palestinian territories, but of an ongoing and continuous augmentation of the occupation, rendering the possibility of attaining a two-State solution increasingly difficult. We believe that those who suffer the most as a result of those policies are the most vulnerable faction of the population, which is comprised of women, older people and children. In that regard, we express our concern about the more than 300 children who have been detained in recent months by Israel's security forces.

As Mr. Mladenov mentioned, we want to draw attention the case of the young girl Ahed Tamimi, who has become a symbol of the Palestinian resistance. Ahed's story is not just about a girl, but rather thousands of youth over decades of occupation. Ahed has borne witness to the violence and injustice that her people endure on a daily basis. She has watched her mother be arrested and her cousin fall into a coma after being shot in the face — both of them victims of Israeli forces. Ahed has felt the fear and hopelessness that other youth cannot even imagine at that age. She has experienced what no parent wants for their children. And despite that, she has demonstrated extraordinary strength and bravery. Israel, a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is the only country in the world that tries children before military courts. We express our solidarity with Ahed Tamimi's family and we are awaiting her prompt release.

Bolivia, as a pacifist country, believes in a unique approach to ensuring fair and lasting peace in the conflict between Israel and Palestine — one based on dialogue and negotiations, with clear political will demonstrated by both parties in order to achieve the two-State solution. For that reason, we reaffirm our full commitment to multilateralism and respect for international law, and we reiterate our support for all international efforts that lead to a peaceful solution to the conflict, such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, among others that are dedicated to entrenching fair and lasting peace, allowing both peoples to live within secure and recognized borders.

We are convinced that the only long-term option to solve the conflict is the two-State solution, where, ultimately, a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State would be established with the pre-1967 internationally recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. In that regard, we reiterate our emphatic condemnation of the decision made by the United States Government to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, since it constitutes a flagrant violation of various Security Council resolutions, such as resolution 478 (1980), which references the withdrawal of States' diplomatic posts from the city. That decision only subverts any possibility of dialogue between the parties and disproportionately moves away from any peaceful solution.

In concluion, we believe that now is the time for multilateralism and for the Security Council to assume its historic responsibility entrusted to it by Charter of the United Nations. Once again, we refuse to believe that this building and the Council have become an occupied territory in a colonized land. Nelson Mandela, who was included on the United States terrorist list until 2008 said that "we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians".

Mr. Tleuberdi (Kazakhstan): Our delegation appreciates the presence of President Mahmoud Abbas in the Chamber and His Excellency's statement to the members of the Security Council. We also thank the Secretary-General for his remarks, and Special Coordinator Mladenov for the latest update.

As a member State of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Kazakhstan shares concerns regarding the future of the two-State solution, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) funding deficit and the need for the international community to lead the Middle East peace process.

Kazakhstan's position on the Middle East peace process remains unchanged. My country urges the parties to maintain the historical status quo of Jerusalem, in accordance with previously reached international agreements. My delegation therefore endorses the statement of Secretary-General António Guterres that the question of the final status of Jerusalem must be resolved through direct negotiations between the two parties. It should be achieved on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. At the same time, the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides should be taken into account.

We support negotiations that result in the two-State solution, and we stand for their early resumption, especially in the bilateral format and without preconditions. The ultimate goal should be

the restoration and promotion of the peace process, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Kazakhstan declares its support for the rights of the Palestinian people to self- determination and the establishment of a free, sovereign and independent State within its international borders pre-1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace with Israel. At the same time, we emphasize the right of Israel to security. We also propose restoring trust and utilizing the confidence-building measures with a three-fold approach, namely, the promotion of a security-development nexus, a revamped regional approach and a more enhanced, coordinated and transparent modus operandi of the United Nations in the wider region, delivering as one United Nations.

We note that the difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza, which further contributes to instability and frustration, could lead to the resumption of conflict and increase of terrorist activities. In that regard, we urge the official authorities of Israel and Palestine to help resolve the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. That requires confidence-building measures with an economic dimension, with support from the international community.

Kazakhstan endorses the concern expressed by the Special Coordinator over the funding of UNRWA this year. A significant reduction of its regular budget has already increased the anxieties of the 5.3 million Palestinian refugees, who have already suffered at the hands of the longest protracted refugee crisis. Kazakhstan also expresses great concern over the growth of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories. All United Nations resolutions in that regard have been an important step to bring about a cessation of settlement activities and prevent violence against civilians.

We also call upon the leaders of Israel and Palestine to take concrete steps that will preserve the possibility of peaceful coexistence between the two States and strengthen the prospects for peace based on the inalienable right of Palestinians to statehood and Israel's right to security, as we mentioned before, and recognition. Kazakhstan welcomes the United States diplomatic efforts in resuming the peace process and talks with the leaders of both countries, which United States President Trump held in Washington, D.C., in recent days.

We call on the Middle East Quartet to revive the work on the Palestinian-Israeli track in the context of United States efforts in that direction. We also welcome the efforts of the Russian Federation and Egypt to ensure intra-Palestinian unity and urge all Palestinian political parties and movements to integrate into one national political structure. Kazakhstan believes it is necessary, in the very near future, to begin negotiations on each existing problem, with a view to reaching an agreement on pending issues and giving them a so-called final status. Only such an approach would lead to the adoption of a basic treaty.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the President, the Secretary-General and Mr. Mladenov. I would like to welcome President Abbas and thank him for his address to the Security Council. I welcome his stated commitment to non-violence and to engaging constructively towards the two-State solution.

The United Kingdom remains committed to a two-State solution that ends the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we will support all and any efforts to that end. Our long-standing goal is a negotiated peace settlement that leads to a safe and secure Israel, living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, with secure and recognized borders and with Jerusalem as a shared capital of both States.

United States leadership on this issue is indispensable to achieving a solution that meets the aspirations of both parties, and we look forward to the announcement of peace proposals when the United States Administration judges them to be ready. United States efforts offer a significant opportunity to deliver peace, and they should be supported and encouraged by all. We stand ready to provide political and practical support to help achieve a viable agreement. We encourage the parties to make a public commitment to renewed peace negotiations based on a two-State solution. In order to move forward, it is important that they reaffirm their commitment to all previous diplomatic agreements, which have taken us closer to peace. Those agreements remain an important basis for renewed talks. We welcome the Palestinian Authority's continued recognition of the State of Israel and the parties continuing security cooperation.

If a peace process is to succeed, it needs to be conducted in an atmosphere free from violence. We

regret that too many people continue to undermine efforts to achieve peace. We condemn the detonation of an improvised explosive device along the Gaza border with Israel on Saturday, which wounded four Israeli soldiers, including two seriously. We also condemn the recent terrorist attack in the West Bank settlement of Ariel. There is never an excuse for terror, and our thoughts are with the family and friends of the victim, as they are with all those who have been affected by violence. Every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. There is also a right to dignity, and we condemn kidnappings, as well as acts that prevent families from being able to properly grieve for their loved ones.

We will continue to press all sides to refrain from engaging in or encouraging incitement to hateful action or language. That only serves to stir up prejudice and takes us further from the goal of achieving peace. In that regard, it is unacceptable for anyone to deny the legitimacy of the connection of either the Jewish or Palestinian peoples to the land. Inflammatory and unhelpful rhetoric on both sides weakens trust, corrodes mutual respect and undermines prospects for peace. We call on both parties to act with restraint and to show bold leadership. Only when both parties reject violence and work together to ensure calm and stability can peace have a chance to flourish.

We are concerned by the Israeli Government's recent decision to establish a settlement deep in the West Bank — the second in 12 months. Those plans have also raised the possibility of the retroactive legalization of the illegal outpost of Havat Gilad, and there have been renewed threats from Israel to demolish structures in Al-Susiya, in the occupied West Bank. We call on Israel to immediately reverse its policies of settlement expansion and demolitions. They undermine the physical viability of the two-State solution and call into question Israel's own commitment to peace.

The lack of Palestinian unity continues to be an impediment to achieving peace. We therefore support reconciliation efforts that lead to the full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. As Special Coordinator Mladinov informed us last week, current conditions in the Gaza Strip are dire. Further deterioration of the humanitarian situation will not only continue to put lives at risk, but would represent a threat to stability in the region. It is essential that all parties work urgently to improve the situation, and we call for an easing of access controls for people and goods into an out of Gaza. The United Kingdom remains a committed supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It must be able to continue its vital work to improve the lives of Palestinian refugees and help maintain stability across the region. It needs appropriate funding to do so.

All United Nations States Members have a role to play in nurturing peace and rejecting violence. We are therefore concerned by incursions across Israel's border with Syria earlier this month. Our commitment to Israel's security is unwavering, and we support Israel's right to defend itself.

The United Kingdom's position on an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement has not changed. It should be based on the lines as they stood on 4 June 1967, with equal land swaps to reflect the national security and religious interests of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples. Jerusalem should be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian States, and its status must be determined through a final-status agreement. A just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees is needed that is demographically compatible with the principle of two States for two peoples.

In conclusion, like everyone in the Council, the United Kingdom strongly supports peace. We want to see renewed peace negotiations, supported by the international community, that lead to a safe and secure Israel — the homeland for the Jewish people — living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State — the homeland for the Palestinian people. Let us all work together to lay the groundwork for peace.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting in order to hear the briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. We commend Mr. Mladenov for the excellent work that he is doing in the Middle East in the search for peace in that region. We welcome the President of the State of Palestine, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and are grateful for his presence at this meeting. We also appreciate the presence of Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is optimistically following developments in Iraq, although it is very concerned about the current situation in Yemen and

Syria, and it expresses its deep concern about recent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Accordingly, we express the full support of Equatorial Guinea for stabilizing and bringing peace to the region in general, and the situation between Israel and Palestine in particular.

Equatorial Guinea regrets the latest escalation of violent incidents and tensions between Palestinians and Israelis, as we just heard in Mr. Mladenov's briefing, and calls on all parties to act rationally and refrain from actions that could aggravate an already complex situation. The Government of Equatorial Guinea, led by His Excellency President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, always advocates for negotiated solutions to all conflicts and problems no matter how complex or intractable they might seem, and, with regard to the case at hand, our Government's stance is no different. We therefore call on all parties involved in the conflict to do their utmost to normalize the situation and alleviate the suffering of the people. The Government of Equatorial Guinea advocates for the two-State solution directly negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians, or within the framework of a multilateral mechanism. It is possible that such a solution might entail painful concessions for both parties, as the very nature of dialogue implies the ability and need to make concessions.

All negotiations must be conducted within the framework of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. The final status of Jerusalem must be the consequence of such negotiations. Equatorial Guinea considers as just the historic claims of the Palestinian people, which have been validated by the various declarations by the African Union and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. But Israel's right to live in peace and security must also be taken into account. The parties should refrain from unilateral actions that could stymie dialogue.

We are deeply concerned about the critical humanitarian situation in Gaza, as highlighted by Mr. Mladenov's briefing. Equatorial Guinea believes that the solution to the grave humanitarian crisis should be a priority for the international community, with the objective of improving the plight of the civilian population. We therefore commend Qatar and the United Arab Emirates on providing financial assistance to ease the humanitarian crisis. Nonetheless, it is not enough to resolve issues with health care, drinking water and electricity. Without those services, it is very difficult to provide medical assistance and a semblance of normalcy. We call for intra-Palestine dialogue to overcome differences. We believe it will have a positive impact on the quest for a just solution to the crisis.

In conclusion, we pay well-deserved tribute to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for its work, despite scarce resources, and call for the continued provision of international financial assistance to an agency whose humanitarian efforts are very noble and laudable.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement. We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his comprehensive briefing. We are also pleased to welcome President Mahmoud Abbas to today's meeting.

Poland strongly supports all initiatives aimed at stabilizing and strengthening peace and security in the Middle East. Regrettably, since our last briefing (see S/PV.8167), no significant positive moves towards achieving peace have been made. On the contrary, we cannot fail to notice that the situation has deteriorated.

We note with concern an increase in the number of incidents along Israel's border with the Gaza Strip — mortar rockets fired from the Strip and Israel's retaliatory measures, as well as growing tensions over Israel's northern border. We recognize Israel's right to defend itself and ensure the security of its citizens. At the same time, we urge all parties to exercise restraint in order to avoid further hostilities that would put large groups of the population at risk. Particularly worrying is the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, where we face a deep crisis with regard to life-saving health, water and sanitation services. The current shortages of fuel could soon aggravate the situation even further, depriving the inhabitants of Gaza of hope and real prospects and inciting inflammatory remarks that result in violence, extremism and radicalization, in particular among young people.

We are deeply concerned about the deteriorating financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The effects of reducing support could lead to serious security and humanitarian consequences, not only in Palestinian territories but also in neighbouring countries that host Palestinian refugees. The Agency already faces great challenges in upholding its mandate

to preserve key services, such as education and health care. The international community, as a whole, cannot shirk its responsibility and obligations to Palestinian refugees. We must make every effort to ensure the smooth continuation of the Agency's work on a solid financial basis. For its part, for years, Poland has actively and regularly supported UNRWA and will maintain its support for Palestinian refugees through annual contributions to the Agency. In response to the current needs, Poland will contribute to UNRWA's general budget in the first quarter of the year.

I would like to add that a stable humanitarian situation in the entire Middle East region is a key priority for Poland. For that reason, in recent years, we have significantly increased our support for the most affected people in Syria, its neighbouring countries and the West Bank through bilateral and multilateral assistance, including the Polish contribution under the Economic Resilience Initiative last year.

In more general terms, let me underline that the Security Council must maintain its commitment to resolving one of the longest-standing conflicts on our agenda. We should continue to seek an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by reviving the peace process. Only a return to meaningful bilateral negotiations, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, can provide positive input to the process. That is the only path towards a two-State solution and resolving all final-status issues. Poland supports a two-State solution under which the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict would be met, including Palestine's right to self-determination and independence and Israel's right to ensure its security and normalization of relations with Arab States.

In line with the long-standing European Union position, we would like to reiterate our position on Jerusalem. We strongly believe that the aspirations of both parties with regard to Jerusalem must be fulfilled, and a way to resolve the status of Jerusalem must be found through negotiations.

We appeal to Israel and Palestine to refrain from unilateral steps that prejudge the outcome of final-status negations, and expect them to demonstrate their commitment to peace through their actions and policies. We condemn all acts of terrorism and incitement to violence. In our opinion, they constitute a significant obstacle to the reactivation of the peace process.

We continue to watch developments on intra-Palestinian reconciliation closely, and we call on all Council members to support that process in accordance with the Quartet principles. We believe that reaching an outcome accepted by the international community could be an important step for the unity of a future Palestinian State and may, in the long term, lead to a sustainable peace agreement. An important element of such a solution is the involvement of countries of the region. We should build on the relevance of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 as a comprehensive framework for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, thereby contributing to regional peace and security.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for attending today's meeting.

We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mladenov, for his informative briefing. China welcomes His Excellency President Abbas of Palestine at today's meeting and thanks him for his remarks.

The question of Palestine is the most protracted regional hotspot since the Second World War. It lies at the heart of the Middle East issue and is fundamental to achieving peace in the region. Only by establishing a genuine State of Palestine can Israel enjoy lasting security. Only a comprehensive settlement to the question of Palestine can bring about a fundamental shift in the situation in the Middle East. China is gravely concerned about the situation between Palestine and Israel, which remains tenuous, and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

All parties should faithfully implement resolution 2334 (2016), cease all settlement activities in the occupied territory and act to prevent further violence against civilians. All parties should remain calm, exercise restraint and move towards each other, thereby helping to foster the necessary conditions for the resumption of talks. We believe that a two-State solution represents the right way forward towards resolving the question of Palestine. The international community should uphold the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, while jointly exploring ways and means to promote peace so as to achieve an early, comprehensive, just and durable solution to the question of Palestine.

The international community should offer guarantees regarding Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Parties with major influence on the Middle East should all play a constructive role in that regard. China remains committed to supporting and facilitating the Middle East peace process. We support the Palestinians establishing a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In July last year, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward a four-point proposal to promote the resolution of the question of Palestine, calling for the advancement of the political process on the basis of the two-State solution, adherence to the philosophy of shared, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, greater coordination of international efforts to maximize synergy for peace, and a holistic approach for peace through development. Work is in full swing to implement that proposal. In December last year, China successfully hosted a symposium of Palestinian and Israeli pro-peace actors and will continue to push for a political settlement to the question in a constructive fashion.

The question of Jerusalem is complex and delicate, but it underpins the future solution to the question of Palestine. All parties should respect historical plurality, uphold fairness and justice, implement international consensus, strive for peaceful coexistence and act upon the relevant United Nations resolutions so as to reach a solution that accommodates all parties' interests through final-status negotiations. Palestine and Israel should respect each other's right to live and avoid any action that may aggravate the current situation.

The international community needs to continue providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people and refugees, which can help improve the political, security and humanitarian situation there. Over the past six decades and more, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has played an indispensable role in easing the humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories. We call upon all parties to scale up their support for UNRWA and countries hosting the Palestinian refugees so as to steadily improve the humanitarian conditions in which the refugees are living.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the holding of today's meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and thanks the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for the quality of their comments and briefings on the subject under consideration. We also welcome the presence among us at this morning's debate of the President of the Palestinian Authority, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, as well as the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel to the United Nations.

Twenty-five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, hopes for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have dwindled, and the compromise solution of two States living side by side in peace and security seems increasingly to recede. This lack of political prospects has contributed to a serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation for the Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

Given this alarming situation, my delegation is worried about a renewed outbreak of violence and confrontation, which would put at even greater risk the possibility of a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. After the clashes of recent days that caused the deaths of two Palestinians and wounded Israeli soldiers, we therefore call on the Israeli and Palestinian parties to exercise the utmost restraint.

My delegation continues to believe that peace between Palestinians and Israelis is still possible, despite the current impasse. My country remains convinced that there is no alternative to peace, which is why we call on the parties to the conflict to engage in constructive dialogue in order to overcome the obstacles. In that context, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the parties — for both sides — to renounce any unilateral initiative that could only jeopardize the chances of a political and peaceful settlement of the crisis.

We would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our principled position in favour of a two-State solution as the only viable option to enable the Palestinian and Israeli peoples to live and coexist in peace and security. Côte d'Ivoire also believes that the final status of the City of Jerusalem must be negotiated as part of a mutually agreed solution between the two parties, as provided for in the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it should be recalled, are disastrous for the people living in the Gaza Strip, who have been faced with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, a high youth unemployment rate of up to 47 per cent, and shortages

of water and electricity. My delegation therefore calls for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, on the basis of enhanced cooperation, we encourage the Palestinian parties to continue to pursue dialogue with a view to achieving an effective return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, which would allow for a better handling of current humanitarian issues.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of today's meeting and welcome the presence among us this morning of the Secretary-General. We would also like to express our gratitude for Mr. Nickolay Mladenov's very detailed briefing. We particularly welcome the presence of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, and other sennior officials.

Peru follows the situation in Palestine with deep concern. The inflexibility of positions, the absence of dialogue between the parties and the unbroken stream of violent episodes have led to a stalemate in the peace process in the form of an unstable and unsustainable status quo. Against that backdrop, we stress the importance and urgency of a forging a basic framework of understanding that would help to reverse negative trends on the ground and favour the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties, with a view to achieving the only viable solution: two States living side by side with secure and mutually recognized borders. In that connection, we should remember the relevance and validity of the Oslo Accords, which provided the parameters necessary for such a solution, as well as the important role of the Quartet.

We consider it necessary, in the political, religious and social spheres, to act with respect, while also seeking to build mutual trust as a precursor to the resumption of constructive dialogue. Leaders on both sides are responsible for showing tangible restraint, a commitment to peace and respect for international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

This leads me to recall the obligation to implement the resolutions of the Security Council. In particular, we deem it urgent to put an end to some practices that have been on the rise in the past year, that is, settlements, the demolition of homes and eviction, in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. All of this must stop, in line with resolution 2334 (2016). Moreover, we urge those parties directly involved to desist from, investigate and punish all violations of and international humanitarian law, all terrorists act and all attacks on civilians.

Tangible steps to this end must be taken. For example, information must be forthcoming on the plight of fallen or detained Israeli soldiers. We believe that the return of the remains of the fallen to their relatives would be an important gesture of humanity. By the same token, we believe that it is essential that the right to legitimate defence be invoked by the Israeli authorities legally and proportionally and in a careful manner. The human rights of Palestinian citizens, including minors, cannot be trampled upon.

In a similar vein, we also believe that it is crucial to reject hate speech, anti-Semitism and discrimination in all its forms. In any society, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity should be viewed as something precious, never as a threat.

We note with concern the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, described a few months ago by Secretary-General António Guterres himself as

> "one of the most dramatic humanitarian situations I have seen in many years working at the United Nations".

We deem it urgent to meet the basic needs of the people in Gaza. Poverty and marginalization are fertile breeding grounds for radicalization and violent extremism. It is important to promote sustainable peace, twinning humanitarian assistance with development plans that offer hope and opportunities to the youth.

We take this opportunity to reiterate our appreciation for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It is important to support the Agency and to endow it with stable and predictable financing. This leads me to hail the extraordinary meeting of the donors conference that took place in Brussels on 31 January, and I also hail the willingness stated by many countries to use their good offices and to contribute to alleviating the situation on the ground.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): First let me welcome the presence earlier of President Abbas here in the Council, and let me thank Mr. Mladenov for his detailed briefing and certainly for his efforts for peace.

The facts on the ground speak for themselves and leave little room for optimism. We face a growing

humanitarian and economic crisis in Gaza, and we see a lack of possibilities for Palestinian development in the West Bank.

I will touch on three points in that context: first, the two-State solution and the need for tangible steps; secondly, the need for commitment and international support; and, thirdly, the situation in Gaza.

With regard to my first point, the two-State solution, it is worth recalling the Oslo accords, signed by President Abbas, who has always advocated a peaceful road towards a Palestinian State. The Oslo accords held the promise of two States within five years of their signing, in 1993. We are now in the twenty-fifth year since Oslo, and the obstacles to peace have only grown.

Oslo was not just a document; it was a vision. We remain firmly convinced that only the two-State solution, based on the borders of 1967, will lead to sustainable peace. We recall that a lasting solution to the conflict must be achieved on the basis of the relevant Council resolutions; the Madrid principles, including land for peace; the road map; the agreements previously reached by the parties; and the Arab Peace Initiative, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands believes that clear parameters define the basis for negotiations, including on Jerusalem. These parameters are key elements of a successful outcome.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands calls upon both sides to translate their stated desire for peace into tangible steps, steps that build trust and contribute to the preservation of the possibility of the two-State solution, in line with resolution 2334 (2016). This requires a fundamental change in the developments on the ground, which continue to undermine the prospect of a two-State solution.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and the actions taken in this context, including continuous demolitions; plans leading to the forced transfer of Bedouin communities in the West Bank; the announcement that the Havat Gilad outpost would be legalized into a settlement; and legislative proposals that entail nothing less than annexation. Such actions and proposals are cause for serious concern.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands' position has not changed: settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the viability of the two-State solution and prospects for a lasting peace. At the same time, the continued violence, including the firing of rockets, as well as incitement, needs to stop.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is deeply concerned by the escalation of violence in and around Gaza. Rocket attacks by militants from Gaza are unacceptable and need to stop. The leadership on both sides must work to prevent escalation.

Secondly, concerning the need for commitment and international support, the current lack of confidence between parties but also in tried formats for negotiations creates a dangerous vacuum. They cause both the Israeli and Palestinian populations to lose hope.

Worldwide examples of resolved conflicts show that negotiations do not start with trust, they start with courage and the political commitment to reach out, build bridges and create trust, taking people along step by step.

The international community can certainly help in providing a political horizon for the two-State solution, in line with relevant Council resolutions. The international community can support the parties to find a path back to the negotiation table. To this end, cooperation between the Quartet partners as well as regional players and with both parties is crucial.

We fully support the initiatives for the two-State solution taken by the High Representative of the European Union, working together with both parties, the other members of the Quartet and regional partners.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to play a constructive role, building on our good relations with both sides.

This brings me to my third point: Gaza. As others have said, the crisis in Gaza is growing rapidly. Unemployment is rising, and the economy is coming to virtual standstill. Gaza faces a lack of energy supply that affects all aspects of life, including the provision of water and the treatment of sewage. Almost none of the groundwater is now fit for human consumption, and raw sewage flows into the sea, polluting the water needed for desalination. The people of Gaza suffer

from insufficient access to adequate health care. In the words of the Secretary-General, Gaza will become unlivable by 2020.

But for many, it is hardly livable this very day. A growing number of people there are dependent on humanitarian aid, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as we all know, is the largest provider of this aid. The critical financial situation of UNRWA is undermining its ability to provide basic services to the people of Gaza. We are concerned that this negative forecast will lead to growing despair in Gaza. It will add to the unpredictability of the situation and increase the risk of instability in the other areas of operations of UNRWA. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that UNRWA is able to execute its mandate as given by the General Assembly.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands calls upon all stakeholders to put the needs of the population at the forefront in future decisions regarding Gaza.

The positive measures suggested by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels can lead to a significant improvement in living conditions. This includes the expansion of possibilities for trade and support for essential services such as water and energy. We therefore call upon all parties involved to live up to the commitments made. We call on the Palestinian Authority to proceed on the challenging path of intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We support the efforts to restore unity between the West Bank and Gaza, and the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza as the single, legitimate governing authority. The incidents over the weekend showed again the need for a political solution for Gaza.

In conclusion, I started by saying there was little cause for optimism. However, in the Middle East optimism is not so much a choice as it is a necessity. This conflict can be solved; the conflict must be solved. We should all work diligently and in concert to advance the two-State solution: the parties themselves, the region and the international community at large.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We would like, as always, to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his useful and comprehensive briefing on the most recent developments concerning the Middle East and Palestine. We have always benefited from his briefings. We were pleased and honoured to have had His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas with us this morning. We thank him for having been at this meeting and for sharing with us his thoughts and vision on the very critical issue at hand. We also thank Ambassador Danny Danon for having been at this meeting and for sharing with us the Israeli perspective.

We are very concerned about the lack of progress in the Israel-Palestinian peace process. The most recent developments have once again brought the Israeli-Palestinian dispute back to the fore, thereby underscoring the urgency of renewed commitment to the peace process without any further delay. It is also our conviction that there is also a need for honest and transparent readiness on the part of all those with the capacity to make a difference to help the two parties move towards mutual accommodation.

Of course, we are deeply concerned by the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. The lack of funding for critical facilities has left many Palestinians without life-saving health, water and sanitation services. There is need for the mobilization of international support to avert a humanitarian disaster. All those who responded to the urgent appeal must be commended, but there is still a shortfall in funding and more needs to be done to ensure that Palestinians have access to life-saving basic services. It is our earnest hope that humanitarian needs will be protected from any temptation to politicize them.

What could be looked at together with this is the need to enable the Palestinian Authority to exercise full control over Gaza based on the Cairo agreement. We believe progress on this issue will not only improve the economic and humanitarian situation, but also advance Palestinian unity, which hopefully could provide impetus for the peace process, which now remains dormant. Although the signing of the Cairo agreement was very welcomed, not much progress has been made in terms of its implementation. That, coupled with access restrictions, continues to exacerbate the humanitarian situation. In that connection, we note the trilateral meeting held recently between the Special Coordinator, the Palestinian Prime Minister and the Israeli coordinator and the discussion held, among others, on facilitating critical humanitarian solutions and revitalizing the economy in Gaza.

Ethiopia's position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has always been unambiguous, as well as very transparent. As much as we support the right of Israel to exist in peace and security, we also support the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-

determination and the right of Palestine to exist as a free and independent State. That is also the position of the African Union, whose decision we have a responsibility to respect. Accordingly, Ethiopia fully supports the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security as the only viable option for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We believe that is not only in the best interests of both Israel and Palestine, but it will also significantly advance peace and security in the Middle East region.

However, it seems to us self-evident that lately moves have been made and actions have been taken that might not contribute to making progress towards a resolution of the outstanding issues on the basis of the two-State formula. Those steps are not only increasing frustration and mistrust, but are also undermining the very viability of the two-State solution. Removing those long-standing obstacles is imperative in order to create the necessary conditions for progress in negotiations between the two parties to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution on the basis of mutual trust and a spirit of compromise that ensures Israel's security and Palestinian aspirations for statehood. That is what the situation calls for, and it is also in the best interests of the two parties as well as the international community as a whole.

Many have said that there is no plan B to the two-State solution. The Secretary-General repeated the same thing today. That cannot be contested. That is why we supported the call for the intensification and acceleration of international and regional efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, lasting and just solution. In that regard, we welcome the holding of the extraordinary session of the international donor group for Palestine, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which met in Brussels last month, bringing together the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as all other relevant partners for the first time in a while to discuss measures to speed up efforts that can underpin a negotiated two-State solution.

The resumption of negotiations requires the full support of all partners, and all should play their part for any meaningful progress to be achieved. In that context, it is incumbent upon the Council to discharge its responsibilities and support such efforts for the sake of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians and peace in the broader Middle East region. No doubt, at the end of the day the responsibility for making progress toward lasting peace and mutual accommodation based on justice and fair play falls on the two parties.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Kuwait.

At the outset, I welcome the presence of Secretary-General António Guterres and thank him for participating in this important and historic meeting on a crucial issue that has occupied the attention of the international community for the past five decades, during which we have witnessed ongoing violations of international humanitarian law through the continued Israeli occupation of occupied Arab territories. The occupation has been condemned and denounced in resolutions of the Security Council that call for it to be brought to an end. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his valuable briefing.

We are honoured by the participation of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas of the sisterly State of Palestine in today's meeting, under my country's presidency of the Security Council for this month. His participation was a valuable opportunity to listen directly to the protagonist of this just cause and to hear what the international community must do to honour its commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations in order to guarantee the right of peoples to self-determination.

Prior to assuming its non-permanent membership of the Security Council early this year, the State of Kuwait pledged to make every possible effort to support the Palestinian cause as the most important cause for Arabs and Muslims everywhere and one of the pillars of Kuwait's foreign policy. We remain firm in our principled commitment to shouldering the concerns and meeting the aspirations of the brotherly Palestinian people to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, by implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Israel, as the occupying Power, continues to place obstacles in the way of a process towards a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. On the basis of our duty and the common responsibility of Council members to maintain international peace and security, we must stress the implementation of the Council's resolutions, which are binding on all Member States, in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations. How can we ignore the fact that the occupation continues to flout the United Nations and

the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy? The occupation perpetrates physical violation of the provisions of international law that mediate international relations today.

The peace process in the Middle East has witnessed many milestones and international initiatives that have resulted in the adoption of many United Nations resolutions. However, failure to commit to these resolutions has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis confronting the defenceless Palestinian people and increased tensions in the region. That has had an impact on international security and stability, and we have witnessed the emergence of other crises in the region that affect us all, such as extremism and terrorism. These cannot be tackled without addressing the root cause and essence of the conflict — the Palestinian question.

We have all witnessed the repercussions of the recent decision on Jerusalem, which is hindering our efforts, jeopardizing the peace process and affecting the balance of the negotiating process. Because we are confident that the United States plays an important role in the peace process, we therefore call on it to work with the international community to compel Israel to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy and end its occupation of all Arab and Palestinian territories, occupied since 4 June 1967, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by all Arab countries in Beirut summit of 2002, through a peaceful resolution that establishes the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

I do not exaggerate when I say that the political will to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will help achieve that goal, because that historic resolution reaffirmed the most important legal principles linked to the Palestinian question, that is, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. Israel, the occupying Power, should strictly honour its commitments and legal responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War.

In addition to that, the resolution condemns measures to change the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. In resolution 2334 (2016), the Council also condemns Israeli settlement activity as an illegal, illegitimate and a blatant violation of international law, recognizing that it is a major obstacle to achieving the two-State solution and a comprehensive and lasting peace. Moreover, resolution 2334 (2016) also states that any changes in the border lines of 4 June 1967 will not be recognized by the Security Council, including changes to the legal and historic status of Jerusalem as one of the final-status issues.

Regrettably, more than a year has passed since that historic resolution was adopted, and it still has not been implemented. Worse yet, when the provisions of the resolution were violated, we witnessed unusual record levels of Israeli settlement activity in occupied Palestinian territory — be it the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing ones — and a blatant violation of resolution 2334 (2016), which led to the forced displacement of the land-owning Palestinian families. The State of Kuwait strongly condemns Israel's illegal and illegitimate policies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and its ongoing violations of the inalienable rights of the our Palestinian brethren people.

I cannot fail to address the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which we are following with great concern, given its dangerous consequences for the lives of 2 million Palestinians there, restricting the delivery of basic services, including health services. The blockade is unjust and we condemn yet again Israel's inhumane practices, which represent a grave violation of human rights and international humanitarian law. The blockade imposed on Gaza is an example of such a violation. I reaffirm that the State of Kuwait will spare no effort to stand by our Palestinian brethren people in all the occupied territories.

The State of Kuwait supports the request of Palestine to operationalize some international mechanisms, such as the Quartet, by expanding its membership to include Arab countries, adding more vitality to its work. We also support all legal and peaceful steps taken by the State of Palestine at the national and international levels to strengthen its sovereignty over Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Palestinian people expect the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, to honour their commitment to maintaining international peace and security. We reiterate our solidarity with and stand by the Palestinian people in defending their just cause and legitimate rights, including their historic and

unshakable right to Jerusalem, as guaranteed by the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. We reaffirm that East Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Palestine. We call on all countries to recognize the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In conclusion, we renew our call on all present to participate in the Arria Formula meeting, to be held in cooperation with a group of Security Council members, to discuss the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) following more than one year of its adoption and 50 years of the Israeli occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose 1.05 p.m.